

This publication provides an exposition of the problems which should prove valuable not only to those engaged in forestry and in Nature conservation, but also to those both from country and town who are not acquainted with the two sides of the dilemma. It is to be hoped that politicians also may find time to read it.

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1986 The State of the Environment (Environment and Health). Printed by the United Nations Environment Programme, P.O. Box 30552, Nairobi, Kenya: ix + 83 pp., 15 figs and 4 tables, 24.6 x 17.5 x 0.7 cm [no price indicated], 1986

This is a well-written and concise report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which explains clearly—by means of factual statements, figures, and charts—why the 'achievement of sustained development, the promotion of health, and the rational use of environmental resources, are inseparable', and how environmental degradation undermines development and damages health; also how poor health, by sapping the strength of the work-force, further obstructs development, leading in turn to greater environmental loss and even more disease.

In tackling the above 'vicious circle', generated by environmental degradation, this report emphasizes the developmental aspects of health and the environment, and concentration on the health problems that can be mitigated by suitable interventions on the environment. The report, as is stated in its introduction, has been hampered by lack of data on vital and health statistics, particularly from developing countries. The data used were derived from official, mostly World Health Organization (WHO) sources, and are based mostly on defective reporting systems and limited one-point-in-time surveys. Hence they can scarcely represent the true picture over a stretch of time, even though they may be used broadly to compare the importance of the various categories of illnesses, and to assess the circumstances that bring them about.

Apart from a succinct 'Executive Summary' given in the beginning of the report, followed by an Introduction, there are three main chapters, each of which deals with a special subject, followed by a 'Summary' (Chapter 4) and the 'Recommendations for Action' (Chapter 5), which 5 may be briefly characterized as follows:

1. *Health Effects of Human Activities with Environmental Consequences*

This chapter comprises the first of the main sections and enumerates the effects, on human health, of poor sanitation, poor quality of water and food, malaria, schistosomiasis, onchocerciasis, and sleeping sickness, as well as of the effects of chemical and radioactive pollutants on health. Two information charts are included, one dealing with figures on life expectancy at birth in the various continents of the world, the other showing the incidence of disease and death from diarrhoeal diseases, schistosomiasis, and malaria.

As stated previously, the figures quoted, though derived from WHO sources, are only rather grossly estimated from developing countries.*

2. *Some Major Activities with Impact on the Environment and, Through It, on Health*

This second, longest chapter by far, explains how agricultural activities to increase crop production, land reclamation, and water projects for irrigation, increase the incidence of debilitating endemic diseases in the developing world—such as of malaria, schistosomiasis, onchocerciasis, and sleeping sickness—and how adverse effects on health are brought about by pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and the increased use of major energy resources, as well as by the building up of means of transport and the adverse impact on health of natural disasters. The figures and charts given to explain the interaction between Man's ill-planned developmental activities and natural disasters and their effects on health, are quite pertinent and revealing.

3. *Development, Environment, and Health*

This third main chapter and section attempts to examine the complex interactions between development, environment, and health, in terms of the decisions that have to be taken about the degree of environmental health protection that is to be provided. The report states that these decisions could be assessed in terms of the amounts of expenditure on public health, and rightly suggests that those expenditures, in the manner of military expenditure, should be placed on the same footing, being national duties; hence their budgetary allocations should not be susceptible to justification on purely economic grounds.

3. *Development, Environment, and Health*

The report further recommends, to all developed and developing countries of the world, due consideration of the values of the application of the methodology of cost-benefit and risk-assessment analysis on a case-by-case basis, with a view to influencing the decision-makers, in all countries, to integrate environmental concerns in the development process from an early or even conceptual stage.

4. *Summary*

This section recapitulates in a very condensed manner all the important points detailed in the previous sections, in order to prepare the reader for the final conclusions and recommendations of the report.

4. *Summary*

5. *Recommendations for Action*

This section deals with recommendations based on the foregoing discussions, taking into consideration also the conclusions of the WHO technical discussions on health and environment which had been arrived at during its 39th World Health Assembly, held in May 1986. Foremost of the general recommendations is the establishment at government level of a strong machinery—formal but flexible—to sustain, systematically, a continued dialogue among all concerned, both inter-sectionally with the different disciplines and internationally with related organizations. Such machinery could thus develop the necessary technical, legislative, and training, requisites for due improvement of the environment.

5. *Recommendations for Action*

The specific recommendations on the protection of the environment from Man-made developmental activities in the production of food, energy, chemicals, and in the provision of housing, home services, and transporting facilities, emphasize the need for developing guidelines, conducting coordinated studies, and effecting wide application of appropriate cost-effective technologies and systems to manage the various activities. The specific role of the international organizations to support, technically and financially, the governments' efforts in the above areas, is also emphasized. Finally there is a list of 122 references from a wide range of sources which seem generally to be well chosen.

* *Note of Reviewer:* The high figure of 1 thousand millions given for diarrhoeal diseases, particularly measles and malaria, in children, is from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. University of Basel Library, on 11 Jul 2017 at 12:38:25, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms>. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0376892900011371>

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